

Top Leaders Share Their Communication Secrets

LeadershipBeyond.com



How The World's Most Successful Leaders Amplified Their Results



Carla Schnitker

Leaders don't communicate they **connect**. That connection is hard to describe but you know when it is there. It's not about the right words. It's something **deeper**.

Top leaders know how to connect. In this Guidebook you'll learn what top leaders in companies like Symantec, Monster.com, and Lockheed Martin changed in their communication to become more **successful**. Act upon this great advice and improve your own leadership communication skills. Page 21 shows you how to create your own coaching plan.

Turn the page. Let the adventure begin.

Carla



Content

About p. 4

Read about Carla Schnitker

1. Listening p. 5-9

You can't listen too much
Listen, then ask questions
Show you have listened
Listen to your gut

2. Feedback p. 10-14

Describe behavior
Don't tiptoe around issues
Close the gap
Let them save face

3. Conflict p. 15-18

Talk or pick up the phone
Support the decision once it is made
Avoid tattletale



Content

4. Effort p. 19-20

5. Your Plan p.21-24

Your Self-Coaching Plan

6. Get Inspired p. 25-26

Success Stories

7. Bonus p. 27-28

All about active listening

8. References p. 28-30

The references

Carla
Schnitker



About

Carla Schnitker is the owner and president of www.LeadershipBeyond.com, an organization that helps managers and leaders to develop their leadership skills. She has worked with many clients on leadership development and communication, cultural change, and employee engagement.

Taping her 20 years of hands-on, executive and consulting experience, she works with organizations in the U.S.A., Europe, Asia, and Africa. Her work has repeatedly led to dramatically stronger organizations with more effective



Carla Schnitker

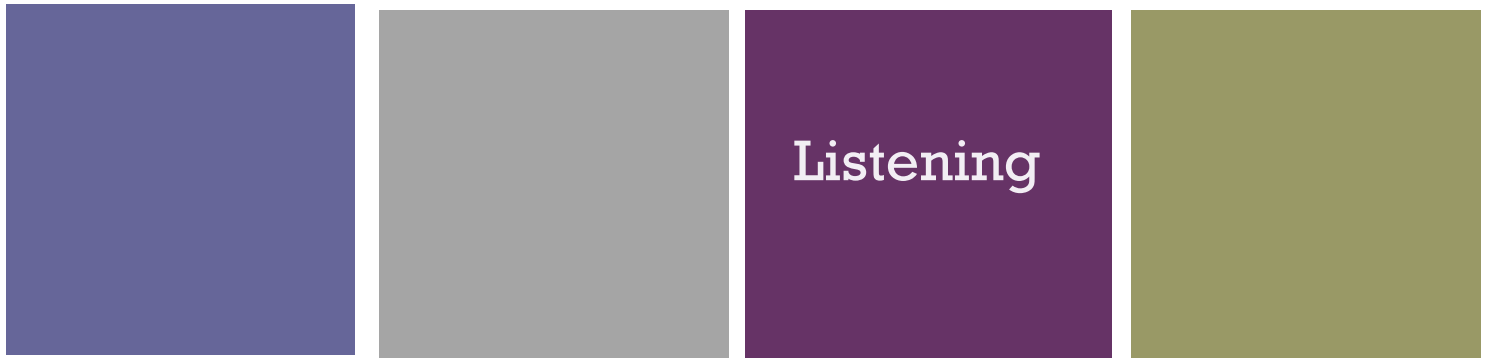
What clients say about her:

"Challenging, Intense, and Nice", Fred Doeleman, CEO K+V interim Management

"I recommend her to anybody", Peter Wiersma, Consultant

"That was a wonderful presentation today. Exactly what our group needed. We were talking about it long after you left- well done". Tom Cech, CCWCD

After working at Universities in Leiden and Indiana Carla entered management. She directed middle managers from finance, engineering, field services, computer systems, and legal affairs. In 2000 she started her own company, Leadership Beyond, with a focus on leadership, change, and turnaround. She is a frequent speaker at conferences addressing leadership development, turnaround and change processes. In addition, she is a noted author on these subjects as well. She lives with her husband in Colorado.



1. LISTENING



Listening

CEO Says:

YOU CAN'T LISTEN TOO MUCH

"We've all heard the criticism "he talks too much". When was the last time you heard someone criticized for listening too much?"

Norm Augustine, Former Chairman of Lockheed Martin

Carla comments:

Finally something you can't do enough. Many things are limited like how much coffee to drink a day, how much chocolate to eat, how much time to spend on social media. You can listen indefinitely and nobody will criticize you for it.

The challenge with listening is that it is more than keeping your mouth closed. Otherwise an unconscious body would be an excellent listener. Listening is an active process. It is work and it goes **deep**.

Now, I've devoted an entire week of my Leadership Beyond Mastery Program (www.leadershipbeyond.com) to this topic of how to really listen. It's definitely not a topic that can be covered in a chapter of a Guidebook.

Please remember this:

Pay attention to your listening. Keep the **distinction** between **listening and hearing** in mind (explained on page 7 of this Guidebook), and decide to keep your mouth shut more often. Your silence can have a bigger **impact** than your speaking.



Listening

CEO Says:

LISTEN, THEN ASK QUESTIONS

"Rather than sitting down with someone and telling them what's wrong or what needs to be fixed, I ask how it came about and what's happening here, and listen to the back story...I can turn it into a coaching moment..."

Niki Leondakis, COO of Kimpton hotel group

Carla comments:

Your employees approach you with their challenges and problems. When they do, take Leondakis' advice to heart: listen. Listen to their story.

Maybe you think that you don't have time for that. The question is however how to best **serve your employees**. Solving their problems might be tempting in the short run. It's probably faster than a listening-coaching approach as described by Leondakis. But, what is the best in the long run? When do your employees learn? And when are you spending your time on your priorities or on their priorities?

You want to serve your employees by helping them **grow**. Your employees will grow if you use Leondakis' two-step approach: listen than ask quality questions.

Quality questions are clear; open (no hidden agendas); start with "what". "who", or "how", and they are open ended. An example is: "What is presently consuming your time that is not your highest priority?"

The result is that your employee grows and you have more time for your own priorities.



Listening

CEO Says:

SHOW YOU HAVE LISTENED

"Leadership has less to do with walking in front and leading the way than it does with listening to the needs of the people of the company and meeting them."

Charles M. Cawley, Chairman and CEO of MBNA America

Carla Comments:

Listen to your employees' needs and **meet them**. The biggest proof that you can give your employees that you have been listening is **showing** that you have listened. You can do that, for example by taking care of a need of one of your employees or by telling them why you can't take care of it. Either way, don't forget to communicate.

Although listening is an essential leadership skill, many managers take listening skills for granted. The key is to differentiate between hearing and listening. Hearing refers to the ability to use the parts of your body that perceive sounds. Listening is perceiving those same sounds with the intention of promoting the growth of the other person. This requires your full attention.

Active listening (see bonus on page 28 for an explanation of active listening) is a method to show that you are listening. Start with active listening if you want to improve your listening skills. Be aware that real listening requires more.

The biggest proof that you have been listening is showing. Of course you can't always meet all your employees' needs. Maybe that would require too much time or money. Employees understand that as long as you get back to them and explain.



Listening

CEO Says:

LISTEN TO YOUR GUT

"And I didn't listen to myself, and I hired them, and it was a mistake. So the lesson there was, at the end of the day, even if everything seems to check out, you listen to your gut".

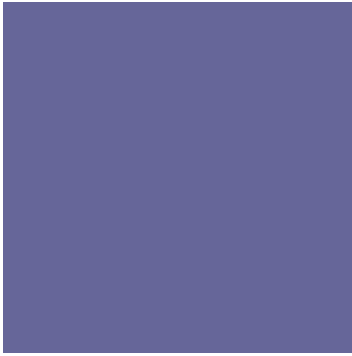
Katherine Hays, chief executive of GenArts

Carla Comments:

In the end when you have listened to all the advice, ideas, and opinions of others you want to listen to **your own gut**. Katherine Hays refers in this interview to hiring a new employee.

I have made the same mistake as Ms. Hays. I have hired people because all the facts looked so good while totally ignoring that little voice inside of me that said "no". I paid dearly for this mistake.

Listen to your gut for each major, and I really mean each, business decision you make. An example of a person who kept on listening to his own gut and gained enormously through it, is Jeff Taylor, the founder of Monster.com, an employment site. When he had the idea of starting a job site named "Monster" everybody thought Taylor was crazy. His wife said that she wouldn't leave the house with him if he would call his business Monster. His biggest client said: "Not only do I hate the name, I don't like the business idea". Taylor listened to his own gut. Monster.com is now in 50 countries.



2. FEEDBACK



Feedback

CEO Says:

DESCRIBE BEHAVIOR

“... rather than describing the behavior and how it makes you feel, you start explaining to the other person what their motivations are for their own behavior. That’s where you get so many problems, because people see the behavior and rather than giving feedback, they sit there and stew and concoct all the reasons why it’s happening.” Andrew M. Thompson, co-founder and C.E.O. of Proteus

Carla Comments:

When you are giving feedback the question “why is someone behaving in a certain way?” is not for you to answer. You want to follow CEO Thompson’s **formula** for giving feedback. He emphasized two components. You want to describe:

1. The unwanted **behavior**
2. How it makes **you feel**

By following this advice you focus on the **facts** (unwanted behavior) and what it does to you (how it makes you feel). That’s it. You are not addressing any assumptions about their behavior that you may have.

The advantages of this approach are first of all that the components are not available for discussion: facts are facts and you know how you feel. Secondly, it doesn’t create space for less constructive elements like accusing your employee of something or analyzing what the motivations are for their behavior.



Feedback

CEO Says:

DON'T TIPTOE AROUND ISSUES

"I am more direct now. Before I would tiptoe around tough issues. It was harder for me to talk to somebody about, "Here's where I need you to improve".

Enrique Salem, C.E.O. of Symantec

Carla Comments:

Maybe you want them to like you. Maybe you don't want to upset them. Maybe ...

Whatever your motives (or excuses) are for not being direct just let those go. If you want to give empowering feedback you don't want to tiptoe around the issue.

I have seen many managers struggle with giving good feedback. I likewise struggled in my early years as a manager. I didn't address the unwanted behavior directly. Whatever was causing my behavior I wasn't serving my employees by tiptoeing around the issues.

Your employees need to know what they can do differently. Give them the **chance to improve.**

And by the way, be aware of using the "sandwich" approach (first state something positive to continue, then something to change, then something good to continue doing) when giving feedback. Too much sugar coating and your employees don't realize the seriousness of what they need to change.



Feedback

CEO Says:

CLOSE THE GAP

"... It's not just the feedback but it's really examining where the gap is, why is the gap there, and how can we close it."

Tiffany Cooper Gueye, C.E.O. Building Educated Leaders for Life

Carla Comments:

Leaders provide feedback to their employees continuously. They see giving feedback as a synonym for creating a **learning moment** for their employees. Their employees learn from what they did well or from what they need to do differently in the future.

That focus on the future has led to the introduction of a new term in leadership literature: "feed forward". **Feedforward** was first used by Marshall Goldsmith and emphasizes the focus on the employee's success in the future. A great advantage is that most employees don't take feedforward as personally as feedback.

Whatever terms you prefer, feed forward or feedback, keep in mind that you want to create that learning moment. You want to close the gap between where your employees are now and where you want them to be in the future. The movement is forward. You and your employees can impact the future, neither of you can change the past.



Feedback

CEO Says:

LET THEM SAVE FACE

"The point is to be very honest, and I try to do it one on one, so they save face".

Dominic Orr, president and CEO of Aruba Networks

Carla Comments:

Giving feedback is creating a learning opportunity for your employee. The human's learning capacity is greatly influenced by the emotional environment in which this learning takes place. The more comfortable your employee feels, the more your employee learns. Giving feedback with other people present makes most employees uncomfortable.

CEO Dominic Orr recommends giving feedback privately. Take care that your employees do not lose face. By giving feedback one-on-one you create the more fertile circumstances in where the employee can receive the feedback without emotions getting in the way.

Many CEO's echo Dominic Orr's advice. The C.E.O. of Hain Celestial Group, Irwin D. Simon, says: "I'm big into communicating face-to-face, eye-to-eye and not through email. Part of what's happened today is we lose a sense of communication because everything is done electronically".

The one-on-one conversation is also very important in potential conflict situations, as the tip on the next page will explain.



Conflict

3. CONFLICT



Conflict

CEO Says:

Talk or Pick up the Phone

“Disagreeing in e-mail is just not constructive. It’s not the right way to communicate if you want to come to an agreement. So that’s one rule that I insist on: Just let’s talk, or pick up the phone.”

Ori Hadomi, chief executive Mazor Robotics



Carla Comments:

Email has many advantages. It’s fast. However, sharing different opinions via email can easily become a conflict or disagreement requiring hours to resolve.

Ori Hadomi avoids this problem in his company by the rule that emails can go back and forward only a couple of time if the senders don’t agree. After that the parties need to pick up the **phone or meet someone in person**.

For instance, I was an interim manager in an organization where emails were used (or maybe abused is a better term) for huge disagreements. This situation was so toxic that within three days of beginning working there I prohibited all email contact except for arranging a meeting. It worked. People started talking again.

I always wondered why emailing or texting has such a high probability of becoming a conflict. For my book “Leading through Change” I did a lot of research on how the human brain works. What I found is that people have the tendency to read emails and text messages negatively. Your brain is hard wired to look out for danger. If the only input is words, your brain is more likely to find that danger.



Conflict

CEO Says:

SUPPORT THE DECISION ONCE IT IS MADE

“...there is a time you debate, but once a decision is made, you need to support the person.

Niraj Shah, C.E.O. of Wayfair.com

Carla Comments:

As a manager or leader you sometimes disagree with a plan or someone’s arguments. There is nothing wrong with that. As Richard Fain, C.E.O. of Royal Caribbean Cruises says: “I always find that you learn more by arguing with someone than just by agreeing with them”.

Disagreement is good because it can lead to better ideas and decisions.

However, Niraj Shah stresses that as soon as a decision has been made you want to support that decision, even if you don’t agree with it. You take ownership of the decision and are able to defend it if needed. You act as part of the team.



Conflict

CEO Says:

AVOID TATTLETALING

“Early on, I decided that whenever somebody comes into my office and starts blaming something on another department, I will say: “Really? Let’s get them in here. Hold that thought.”

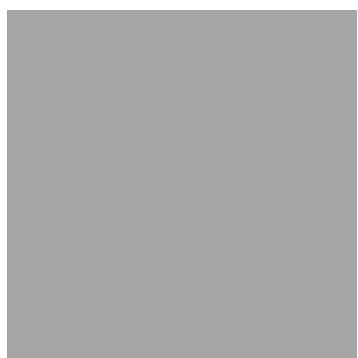
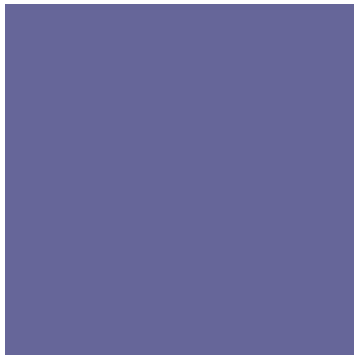
Mark Fuller, C.E.O. of WET design

Carla Comments:

To avoid tattletales and possible conflict CEO Mark Fuller gets employees involved **together**. Do this as soon as you can. Get the disagreeing partners together and let them solve the issue. Take care of not solving it for them.

In the same interview Fuller explains that when disagreeing parties meet together face-to-face they back off most of the time. They will say that things weren’t quite as bad as they first expressed.

What I like about this advice is the **integrity**. You go back to the source. If you do this over and over again, you will create a culture in your organization in which people don’t tattletale.



4. EFFORT



Effort

CEO Says:

Make an Effort

“Two minutes phone call, or handwritten note. I can’t begin to tell you how important that stuff is. E-mails are easy, but sometimes they get in the way of really feeling how somebody feels about your effort”.

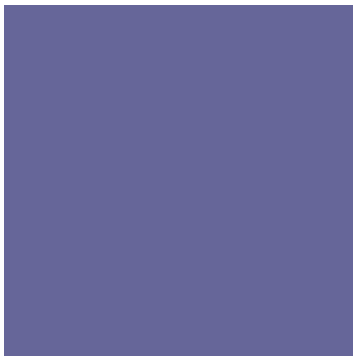
Joseph Plumeri, chairman Willis Group Holdings

Carla Comments:

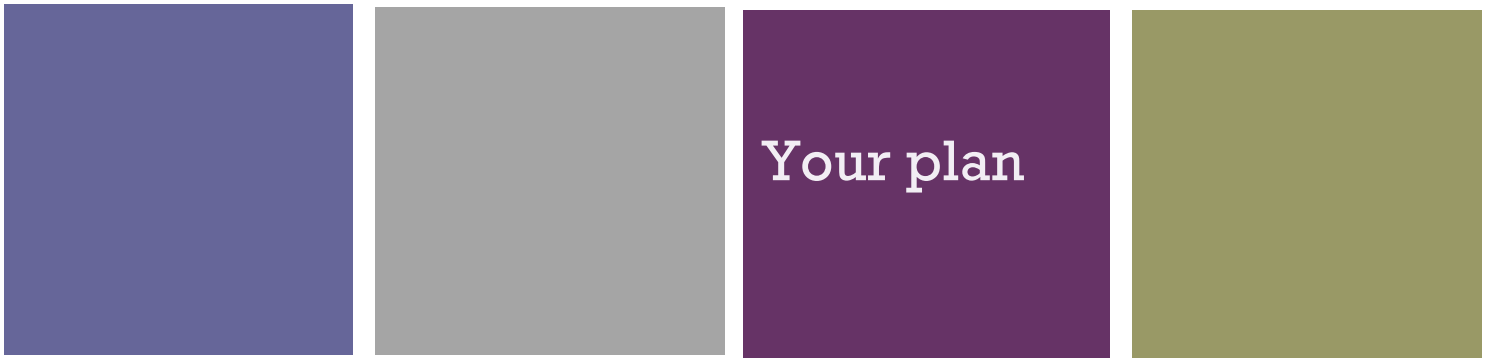
Leaders communicate in order to **connect** with someone. That takes effort and time. Of course you can connect by sending an email. However, your employees will feel differently if you make the effort to pick up the phone or send them a personal, handwritten note. You don’t have to go as far as Plumeri has. He spends about 25% of his time on those phone calls or handwritten notes.

My personal favorite is a **handwritten** “Thank you” card. That is such a great **employee engager**. Employees keep them for years. Just go a store and buy 25 different cards. Put them in a drawer in your desk and write them immediately when you want to thank someone. You can’t go wrong with a thank you card if you keep these three rules in mind:

- Be specific. Describe in detail what you want to thank them for.
- Make it special by not sending the same person several Thank You’s a month
- Send it as soon as possible after their exemplary behavior; otherwise, it will lose impact.



YOUR SELF-COACHING PLAN



YOUR SELF-COACHING PLAN

When I work with my coaching clients I always take care that they are ready to act. Although I would love to create a coaching plan with you one-on-one this goes of course far beyond this guidebook. My invitation to you is to create your own mini-coaching plan. You can use this layout to coach yourself through that process.

Step 1

Choose what CEO's recommendations you like best from the list on the next page

Step 2

Choose one that will have the most impact on your leadership. Write that recommendation at the top of page 21.

Step 3

Write down with whom you will target for that recommendation.

Step 4

Write down when and where this will take place

Step 5

Do it.

Step 6

Write down what you have learned from following the recommendation.

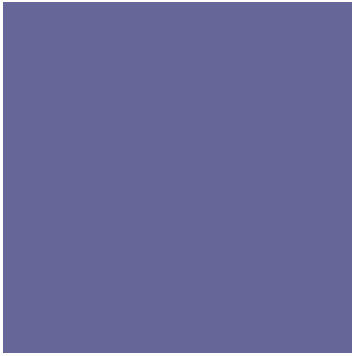


Your plan

YOUR SELF-COACHING PLAN

Step 1. I Like These Recommendations:

- 0 You can't listen too much
- 0 Listen, then ask questions
- 0 Show you have listen
- 0 Listen to your gut
- 0 Describe behavior
- 0 Don't tiptoe around issues
- 0 Close the gap
- 0 Let them save face
- 0 Talk or pick up the phone
- 0 Support the decision once it is made
- 0 Avoid tattletale
- 0 Make an effort



YOUR SELF-COACHING PLAN

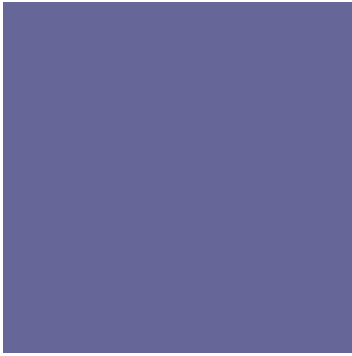
Step 2. I Am Going to Follow this Recommendation:

Step 3. I Am Going to Use It With (name person):

Step 4. Specific Time and Place:

Step 5. I Actually Used the Advice on:

Step 6. What I Learned From Following the Recommendation:



Get
Inspired



Get Inspired



Get
Inspired

SUCCESS STORIES

1. Her Own Fear

Giving feedback was difficult for one of the attendees of my training on giving feedback. She dreaded the yearly performance reviews. She needed to give more feedback during the year. And if she did give feedback quite often some time had passed between the specific happening and her feedback.

During the training she realized that the reason why she dreaded giving feedback so much was her own fears (“Will they still like me? I need this job”) than of being of service to her employees. She faced her fears and became very good at giving honest feedback.

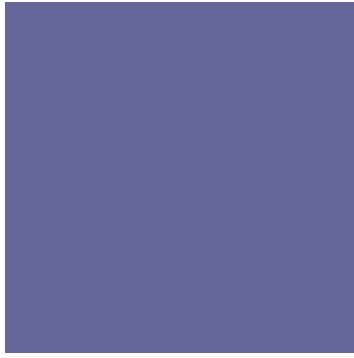
2. Too Much Work

A coaching client seemed to work day and night. When he was young it had been easier for him to keep up but now with his workload as a manager and a family at home it was getting harder and harder.

When he interacted with his direct reports he didn’t coach them. Instead he solved their problems. His reasoning was that he didn’t have time. After some coaching he decided to try it for a whole week. And although his fear became true, it did cost him more time, he continued after that first week. He never went back to his old style. After two months he found he had more time for his own priorities. Furthermore he derived great satisfaction from helping his employee grow.

3. A Stupid “Thank You”

“Employee engagement” was just a fashionable management term to a client. He resisted it. His favorite response was “People should be happy to have a job in this economy”. However, he was also courageous and willing to try something new: he committed to use some of the employee engagement tools we had discussed. That month he wrote one of his employees a sincere “Thank You” card. Afterwards he said that he would never forget the look on the face of the guy. It was the turnaround for him. He started implementing employee engagement. Productivity went up with 38% in his organization.



BONUS



Bonus

ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is a specific technique that forces you to listen to others. The benefits are many. It helps people to open up which leads to more understanding. Active listening is a great starting point if you want to improve your listening skills.

Active listening consists of four components:

1. Body language
2. Listening sounds
3. Stating
4. Checking

Let me give you an example to make the 4 components clear.

Peter and Susan are in a meeting. Susan asked for the meeting because she is really upset that she didn't get the new position she wanted. She starts the conversation with giving all her arguments why she and not Steve, the other internal candidate, should have the position. Peter shows through his **body language** that he is listening. He nods sometimes affirmatively and bends forward. He also makes **listening sounds** by saying things like "Go on"; "Okay"; "HMM". After a while Susan stops talking. She looks at Peter with a "now you" expression on her face. Peter takes the opportunity to **state** in his own words what Susan had been communicating. He states her arguments (the content) as well as her emotions (anger). Peter says, "I hear that you are angry because I gave that project to Steve and not to you. Then he **checks**, "Is that correct?"

By using the active listening technique Peter forced himself to listen and Susan felt more heard. Active listening is a first step in improving your listening skills.



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Page 9

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Page 11

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Page 12

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Page 13

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Page 14

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Page 16

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Page 17

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Page 18

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Page 20

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